CLAIMS:

1.   A method of selectively distributing data to a set of devices linked by a
        network, each said device having at least one unique identifier, the method
        comprising the steps of:
        selecting devices to be members of the set, the set devices being selected to
        receive the data based on the at least one unique identifier; and
        distributing data to at least the selected devices, the data including at least
        one matching key for matching at least a portion of the unique identifier of
        selected devices.

2.   A method according to claim 1 wherein the data is broadcast to a plurality
        of the devices over the network but wherein only selected devices
        selectively install the data.

3.   A method of selectively installing data at one of a set of devices linked by a
        network, each device having a unique identifier, the method comprising
        determining whether to install the data based on matching at least a portion
        of the unique identifier to at least one received matching key associated
        with the data.

4.   The method of any preceding claim wherein the unique identifier is
        independent of the content of the data.

5.   The method of any preceding claim wherein the unique identifier is a device
        hardware identifier.

6.   The method of any preceding claim wherein the set of devices comprises one
        of a plurality of substantially arbitrarily partitioned subsets of a population of
        devices.

7.   The method of any of claims 1 to 4 wherein the set of devices is selected by
        one or more predetermined geographic regions common to the set devices.

8.   The method of any preceding claim wherein the data comprises instruction

code or a software update.

9.   The method of any preceding claim wherein the unique identifier is a string of bits or characters.

10.   The method of claim 9 wherein the unique identifier is a string of a first length and the set of devices is determined from a shorter length subset of the string of the first length.

11.   The method of claim 10 wherein the first length is at least about 32 bits.

12.   The method of claim 10 or 11 wherein the shorter length subset of the string is of a selectable length.

13.   The method of claim 2 or any claim dependent thereon wherein the step of installing the data is performed after performing one or more predetermined action steps to determine whether or not to install the data.

14.   The method of claim 13 wherein the one or more action steps include determining whether the data includes the key corresponding to the device.

15.   The method of any one of claims 10 to 14 wherein the key corresponds to the shorter length subset.

16.   The method of any one of claims 13 to 15 wherein the one or more action steps are performed when a device initialisation instruction is performed by the device when the device is switched to a power on state or when the device is switched to a standby state.

17.   The method of any one of claims 13 to 15 wherein the one or more action steps are performed periodically or at regular intervals while the device is in communication with the network.

18.   The method of any one of claims 13 to 17 wherein the one or more

predetermined action steps include the steps of:

determining the version of a device data of a set device;

comparing the version of the device data with the version of the data to be distributed; and

determining whether or not to perform the step of downloading the data to be distributed, based on the outcome of the step of comparing the versions of the device data and the data to be distributed.

19. The method of any one of claims 13 to 18 wherein the predetermined action steps are performed by the device.

20. The method of any one of the preceding claims wherein each device is arranged to run a manual update routine for allowing a user to decide whether to download data flagged as user selectable from the network, wherein the manual update routine is modified so that, in place of user decision, the routine runs a test routine to determine whether to download data flagged as user selectable.

21. The method according to claim 20 wherein the test routine comprises comparing the matching key to the unique identifier.

22. A device for running data, the device being linked to other devices by a network, the device including:

a processor;

a memory with stored data processable by the processor; and

at least one unique identifier,

wherein the data stored by the memory includes a routine for checking for update data for the device, and for selectively downloading the data based on at least a portion of the unique identifier, and at least one key associated with the update data.

23. The device of claim 22 wherein the update data includes the key and the device selectively downloads the update data when the key correlates to the at least a portion of the unique identifier.

24.   The device of claim 22 or 23 wherein the unique identifier is a device hardware identifier.

5   25.   The device of any one of claims 22 to 24 wherein the unique identifier is a string of bits or characters.

26.   The device of claim 25 wherein the unique identifier is a string of a first length and the at least a portion of the unique identifier is determined from a shorter
10   length of the first length.

27.   The device of claim 26 wherein the first length is at least about 32 bits.

28.   The device of claim 26 or 27 wherein the shorter length subset of the string is
15   of a selectable length.

29.   The device of any one of claims 22 to 28 wherein the device is a set top box.

30.   The device of any one of claims 22 to 29 wherein the network is a subscription
20   television service.

31.   The device of any one of claims 22 to 28 wherein the devices are:
       mobile telephones and the network is a mobile telephone network; or
       telephone base stations and the network is a telephone network; or
25   computers and the network is a computer network; or
       back to base home security devices and the network is a back to base security network.

32.   A system for selectively distributing data to of a set of devices linked by a
30   network, each said device having at least one unique identifier, the system comprising:
       means for selecting devices to be members of the set, the set of devices being selected to receive the data based on respective unique identifiers of the devices;

means for distributing data to at least each selected device, the data including at least one matching key for matching at least a portion of the unique identifier of selected devices; and

means for running the data on each respective selected device.

33. A method of updating a device which has an update routine which checks for available updates over a network and selects available updates which are applicable to the device for download, each update having associated therewith an update condition selected from a plurality of pre-determined conditions which conditions include at least (1) at least one power change condition and (2) a user-selection condition, the device being arranged to execute a user confirmation routine on selection of an available applicable update associated with a user-selection condition, the method comprising executing a routine which performs a test to determine whether a selective update criterion is met in place of the user confirmation routine and which automatically opts to install the available applicable update if the selective update criterion is met.

34. The method of claim 33 wherein the device is arranged to execute the routine which performs the test to determine whether a selective update criterion is met.

35. The method of claim 33 or 34 wherein performing the test comprises comparing additional update data associated with the available applicable update to device data obtained from the device.

36. The method of claim 35 wherein the additional update data comprises matching key data and the device data comprises a unique identifier of the device.

37. The method of claim 36 wherein performing the test comprises detecting at least a partial match between said matching key data and said unique identifier.

38.   The method of any of claims 35 to 37 wherein the extent of match required for a positive test result is specified in the additional update data.

39.   The method of any of claims 33 to 38 wherein said at least one power change condition includes (a) detection of a switch to or from a standby condition and (b) a hard power-up condition.

40.   The method of any of claims 33 to 39 wherein the conditions further include (3) an immediate installation condition signifying that an available applicable update is to be applied without waiting for a power change condition or user selection.

41.   The method of any of claims 33 to 40 wherein the routine which performs the test is arranged to revert to requesting user confirmation in the absence of data specifying the selective update criterion.

42.   A method of providing updated data to a population of devices, the method comprising partitioning the population of devices into subsets, making the updated data available to a first subset, and subsequently making the data available to further subsets, characterised by monitoring the response following making available to the first subset and setting the size of further subsets and/or the rate of making data available to further subsets based on the response.

43.   The method of claim 42 wherein the size of further subsets is increased in the event of a low level of response.

44.   The method of claim 42 or 43 wherein the subsets are defined by specifying a portion of a matching key to match to a unique identifier of each device.

45.   The method of claim 44 wherein the size of each subset is determined by setting the length of the portion of matching key to match, wherein a shorter matching portion will match a larger number of devices.

46.   The method of claim 45 wherein a longer portion of matching key is used to define a smaller first subset and a shorter portion of matching key is used to define at least one larger further subset.

5   47.   The method of any of claims 42 to 46 wherein monitoring the response comprises obtaining a measure of response based on user feedback.

48.   The method of any one of claims 1 to 20 or 33 to 47 wherein the devices are set top boxes.

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49.   The method of any one of claims 1 to 20 or 33 to 47 wherein the network is a subscription television service.

50.   The method of claim 48 or 49 wherein the set of devices is selected by
15   determining one or more channels subscribed by and common to users of the respective set devices.

51.   The method of any one of claims 1 to 20 or 33 to 47 wherein the devices are:
       mobile telephones and the network is a mobile telephone network; or
20   telephone base stations and the network is a telephone network; or
       computers and the network is a computer network; or
       back to base home security devices and the network is a back to base security network.

25   52.   A computer program or computer program product comprising means for performing the method of any of claims 1 to 20 or 33 to 51.

53.   A method of selectively distributing data to a set of devices linked by a network substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying
30   drawings.

54.   A method of selectively installing data at one of a set of devices linked by a network substantially as herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

55.   A device for running data substantially as herein described with reference to
       the accompanying drawings.

56.   A system for selectively distributing data substantially as herein described with

5   reference to the accompanying drawings.

57.   A method of updating a device substantially as herein described with
       reference to the accompanying drawings.

10   58.   A method of providing updated data to a population of devices substantially as
       herein described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

59.   A computer program or a computer program product substantially as herein
       described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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